

Message Text

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51

ACTION EA-14

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TAGS: PGOV, TH

SUBJECT: PUAI RESOLUTION FOR A REFERENDUM ON THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION

SUMMARY: DR. PUAI UNGPHAKON HAS SUBMITTED A RESOLUTION, THAT 78 OTHER MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY HAVE SIGNED, CALLING FOR A REFERENDUM ON THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION. THE MAJORITY OF THE THAI PEOPLE ARE LIKELY TO APPROVE THE CONSTITUTION NO MATTER WHAT ITS FINAL FORM, BUT A REFERENDUM WOULD DELAY THE GENERAL ELECTIONS UNTIL EARLY 1975. PUAI'S MOTIVE, IN ADDITION TO GIVING THE CONSTITUTION GREATER LEGITIMACY THROUGH PUBLIC ENDORSEMENT, MIGHT BE TO MAKE THE PUBLIC MORE CONSCIOUS OF THE DOCUMENT AND SOME OF ITS KEY PROVISIONS. ANOTHER HOPE IS THAT THE POPULACE WILL IDENTIFY WITH THE CONSTITUTION MORE THAN IN THE PAST, AND THEREBY PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INSURANCE THAT FUTURE LEADERS, MILITARY OR OTHERWISE, WILL NOT ARBITRARILY DISCARD IT. END SUMMARY.

1. DR. PUAI UNGPHAKON HAS SUBMITTED A RESOLUTION IN THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (NLA) RECOMMENDING A REFERENDUM ON THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION AFTER IT PASSES ITS THIRD READING IN THE NLA. (MOST SOURCES LOOK FOR THE THIRD READING IN JULY OR AUGUST 1974). SEVENTY-EIGHT OTHER MEMBERS OF THE NLA HAVE SIGNED HIS PETITION. WERE THE CONSTITUTION

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TO BE DEFEATED IN THE REFERENDUM, THE GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE

TO PRESENT A NEW CONSTITUTION WITHIN 60 DAYS.

2. PRIME MINISTER SANYA THAMMASAK SAYS THAT THIS IS AN ISSUE FOR THE NLA TO DECIDE, AND THAT IF THE NLA ACCEPTS IT THE GOVERNMENT WILL SET ASIDE THE REQUIRED FUNDS. HE AND KHUKRIT PRAMOT, SPEAKER OF THE NLA, BELIEVE THE REFERENDUM WOULD DELAY GENERAL ELECTIONS PROBABLY BEYOND THE NEW YEAR. PUAI HIMSELF FEELS THAT THE BEST TIME TO HOLD GENERAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE AFTER THE HARVEST IN FEBRUARY 1975.

3. TO DATE ONLY ONE NEWSPAPER, "BAN MUANG" (THAI LANGUAGE) HAS COMMENTED ON THIS LATEST IN A SERIES OF PUAI CALLS FOR A REFERENDUM ON THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION. "BAN MUANG", IN AN APRIL 15 EDITORIAL, POINTS OUT CORRECTLY THAT MOST THAI HAVE LITTLE OR NO KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WHAT A CONSTITUTION IS. THE PAPER GOES ON TO STATE, "SO WHETHER THE PUBLIC APPROVES OR DISAPPROVES THE CONSTITUTION OR WHETHER THEY HAVE MADE THE CORRECT DECISION IS OF NO CONSEQUENCE". "BAN MUANG" REMAINS AT A LOSS AS TO "THE INTENTION OF POLITICIANS WHO ARE TRYING TO PUSH FOR A REFERENDUM".

4. COMMENT: PROMINENT DEMOCRAT POLITICIAN AND NLA MEMBER PICHAI RATTAKUN TOLD US APRIL 16 THAT HE FELT THE REFERENDUM WOULD BE SUPERFLUOUS. AT THIS STAGE, PUAI SEEMS UNLIKELY TO WIN ENOUGH NLA VOTES TO CARRY HIS RESOLUTION. A REFERENDUM WOULD nevertheless HAVE SOME BENEFIT. IT WOULD BE A WAY TO BEGIN EDUCATING THE PEOPLE AS TO WHAT A CONSTITUTION IS AND WHY THEY SHOULD IDENTIFY WITH IT. ACADEMICS LIKE PUAI MAY BELIEVE THAT THIS TECHNIQUE WOULD MAKE IT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT FOR ANY FUTURE MILITARY LEADER, OR CLIQUE GROUP OF THE OLD SCHOOL, TO TEAR UP THE CONSTITUTION AND DISBAND THE PARLIAMENT. THE DELAY IN ELECTIONS THAT A REFERENDUM WOULD PROBABLY CAUSE WOULD ALSO HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OF GIVING POLITICAL PARTIES MORE TIME TO FORM THEMSELVES.

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